Resources For Research in Librarianship

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ANY DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH methodology in librarianship or anything else should begin, as Socrates constantly reiterated twenty-four hundred years ago, with definitions of terms. Broadly interpreted, the word librarianship encompasses an immense variety of activities and interests. The ancient concept of librarians as mere custodians of books has become largely passé in our generation. Modern members of the breed range from generalists, who know something about practically everything, to specialists on the most minute matters. It would be fair to state, in fact, that there is room in our profession for *anyone* concerned with intellectual affairs—and perhaps for some who are not.

Under the vast rubric of librarianship, we have blanketed the bookmobile operator in New Mexico, the research librarian at DuPont and General Motors, the expert on children's literature in the Chicago Public Library, the Air Force librarian at Chanute Field, the Urbana High School librarian, the Director of the Harvard University Library, the Librarian of Congress, the rare book specialist in the J. Pierpont Morgan Library, and so on and on, ad infinitum. All these and many more play key roles in the great, complex American library system, performing a range of services which the rest of the world is striving to emulate.

An illustration of the diversity of interests represented in librarianship is offered by the area which has occupied a good share of my professional attention over the past thirty years, that is, general resources for research. Investigations of library resources have taken me into studies of various phases of inter-library cooperation, union catalogs, union lists, bibliographical centers, storage centers for little-used books, specialization of fields, microreproduction projects, regional planning, abstracting and indexing, bibliographical publishing, evalu-

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ative surveys of resources, exchanges of publications, and cooperative purchasing.

Resources for research in librarianship divide themselves naturally into two principal categories: the unpublished manuscript or archival records, and the printed or near-print materials. Let me review briefly the nature of each type.

Unless materials are discarded to save space, every library accumulates an archival collection, consisting of its own correspondence, general and departmental reports, trustees' minutes, book lists, records of borrowers, and similar materials. In a great majority of cases, these files are only of local interest, but are indispensable to anyone who attempts to chronicle the history and progress of an individual institution. In certain instances, the libraries may be of national and international interest, and their archives form an important chapter in the nation's cultural history. Note, for example, the excellent published histories, based principally upon their own records, of the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, the Boston Athenaeum, the Philadelphia Library Company, the New York Society Library, the John Carter Brown Library, the Chicago Public Library, the Harvard University Library, the University of Virginia Library, and others. Without pride in their ancestry and care in the preservation of primary sources relating to their past and present activities, these famous institutions could scarcely have had their stories reconstructed by historians.

Closely related to institutional archives are the private papers of outstanding librarians, whose contributions to their profession make their careers of more than ordinary significance. These manuscripts are often scattered, especially if an individual has been associated with more than one library. Noteworthy biographies that have been written on the basis of such collections include H. M. Lydenberg's John Shaw Billings, Fremont Rider's Melvil Dewey, Maurice Tauber's Louis Round Wilson, Edward Holley's Charles Evans, Lewis Branscomb's Ernest C. Richardson, Joseph Borome's Charles C. Jewett, Linda Eastman's William Howard Brett, W. P. Cutter's Charles A. Cutter, Chalmer Hadley's John Cotton Dana, Robert Shaw's Samuel S. Green, and the autobiographies of William Warner Bishop, Charles H. Compton, and Fremont Rider.

Other basic resources for a well-rounded picture of American librarianship are the archives of library schools. Since a majority of librarians begin their professional careers with a period of study in

these institutions, we should expect to find there the earliest data on thousands of members of the library world. Here, too, are the raw materials for research into the history of library education; without the graduate library schools, we could hardly lay claim to being a genuine profession. The admission, scholastic, and placement records of the schools contain information nowhere else available. We can only hope that space requirements will not force the discard of non-current records.

In particular peril, probably, if they have not been taken over by active schools, are the records of accredited library schools no longer in existence, such as the New York State Library School at Albany, the Carnegie Library School of Atlanta, the Hampton Institute Library School, the Los Angeles Library School, the New York Public Library School, the St. Louis Library School, the College of William and Mary Library School, and the Carnegie Library School of Pittsburgh. Some of these library schools had careers extending up to sixty years or more.

The archives of professional associations are still another prime source for research on librarianship. There are at least seventy national, regional, and state library associations of general character in the United States, and an even larger number of local library clubs and of organized groups of library trustees, children's librarians, school librarians, etc. Unquestionably, the work of library associations has been and continues to be a major factor in the development of librarianship. Beginning with the informal Librarians' Conference of 1853 in New York, and continuing with the formal organization of the American Library Association in 1876, followed by the Special Libraries Association, the Association of Research Libraries, and groups devoted to such special fields as medicine, law, music, theology, and theatre, we have had professional organizations actively working toward higher standards of service, better professional education, research in library problems, and the dissemination of library ideas.

Consider, for example, the diversified program carried on by the oldest and largest of the professional societies, the American Library Association. Its twelve major divisions cover every type of library and type of activity. None of the modern library's essential elements—staff, books, readers, and buildings—is neglected in the multiple interests with which the Association is concerned today. The varied program carried on by the American Library Association, and to a

lesser extent by other library professional associations, produces a vast amount of archival records—literally mountains of paper. Since much of the work of these organizations is assigned to voluntary boards and committees, scattered over the country, with frequently changing personnel, the records are decentralized to a large extent, and tend to be lost and discarded after a few years. Only the materials accumulated at headquarters are likely to be preserved. A systematic plan for the preservation of worthwhile files amassed elsewhere than in the central offices would be highly desirable, but is nearly always handicapped by space considerations.

These, then, are the chief categories of archival and manuscript resources for research in librarianship: the records of individual libraries, the personal papers of leaders in the library profession, library school files, and the records of library associations.

One other source, of a somewhat heterogeneous character, ought to be mentioned. Librarians are more addicted than any professional group of my acquaintance to meetings, in addition to those of their regular associations, which certainly meet often enough. Thus we have a plethora of special conferences, institutes, and workshops, lasting perhaps from one day to a week, dealing with just about every conceivable aspect of librarianship. Often they are one-shot affairs, or they may continue year after year, as do the University of Chicago Graduate Library School annual summer institutes beginning in 1936, and the University of Illinois fall institutes at Allerton House, which started ten years ago. Sometimes the proceedings of such conferences and institutes are published, though often a stenotypist's transcript or a collection of working papers may be the only physical records of them in existence. In any event, while there is a naturally considerable variation in value, this type of activity as a whole engages the leaders in various branches of the profession, new areas may be explored, and the treatment of a field can be systematic and comprehensive. Therefore, they represent significant contributions to research in librarianship, and ways and means should be found to record and to preserve unpublished materials produced by them.

Another favorite pastime of librarians is surveys, ranging in scope from studies of small individual institutions to, say, the Public Library Inquiry, national in coverage. The nature of surveys is likewise diverse, including studies of administrative structure, personnel, book collection and other resources, cooperative activities, community relationships, clienteles served by libraries, buildings and equipment.

Again, this is a type of activity which has drawn upon some of the best talents available in the library field, and has had far-reaching influence. If there are those who are skeptical of the effectiveness of library surveys, their attention ought to be directed to E. W. Erickson's ACRL monograph *College and University Library Surveys, 1938-1952.*[1] Erickson demonstrated conclusively that, at least for the particular group of surveys which he investigated some years after the fact, the recommendations of the surveyors had been extensively implemented in such matters as government, organization and administration, technical and readers' services, integration and cooperation, library buildings, resources for study and research, personnel, and financial administration. A good number of the scores, or perhaps hundreds, of surveys produced in the past twenty-five years or so have been published, or issued in near-print form. Others are available only in the files of individual libraries, or are in the possession of the surveyors, but even those published necessarily exclude much raw data of value for research in librarianship and for studies of methodology.

Up to this point, I have been concerned primarily with unpublished materials relating to librarianship. There is, of course, an immense literature of published writings, too. Probably of most permanent importance are the serial publications, the periodicals, yearbooks, annual reports, and government series. A steady stream of publications—books, pamphlets, journals, and reports—emanates from international, national, regional, state, and local organizations. A directory, compiled by the ALA Periodicals Round Table, discovered some 700 library periodicals being issued in the United States alone.[2] Quality is rising along with quantity. From the point of view of literacy, depth, and substance, the best of our journals compare favorably with professional journals in other fields. Many articles represent solid research achievements, and the general average is going up, as you will agree if you compare the current crop to some of our library literature of a generation ago.

For the student and research worker in library science, the strongest collections are to be found principally in libraries associated with library schools. Attempts at comprehensive coverage of the field of library literature, American and foreign, are being made at Columbia, Illinois, and several other schools carrying on doctoral level work. Collections of similar scope and size would be found also in such institutions as the Library of Congress and the New York Public

Library, which are not connected with any library school. The extent of literature in the field is indicated by figures from the Columbia University School of Library Service Library, which reports holdings of some 85,000 volumes, and the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science Library which has 50,000 bound volumes, 876 current periodicals, and 28,000 library reports organized for use. The library school libraries of the University of California (Berkeley) and the University of Michigan report collections of 32,000 and 14,000 volumes, respectively.

The materials classified as library science, technically speaking, represent only a fraction of the literature useful to the research worker in the field. We are concerned with the entire broad sweep of bibliography, history of books and bookmaking, paleography, printing, binding, bookselling and publishing, copyright, national and subject bibliography, and related aspects. But beyond library science and bibliography, and because modern librarianship is a social science, anyone seriously engaged in research in the library field draws extensively upon such areas as sociology, statistics, political science, economics, law, public administration, education, and communications. Depending upon the nature of his investigation, he may also wander off into practically any other discipline one may name—philosophy, religion, science, technology, fine arts, literature, geography, or history, for example. Like the universal man of the Renaissance, we refuse to confine our interests to anything short of the universe.

If we accept this premise, that nothing pertaining to man and his affairs is alien to our interests, it is legitimate to conclude that we are concerned with the totality of library resources. As the concluding section of this paper, therefore, I want to sketch briefly some problems and techniques involved in studies of library resources for research.

Specifically, how can the scholar, the research worker, or the advanced student discover the rare books, periodical files, manuscripts and archives, scarce pamphlets, and special collections pertinent to his area of investigation? Present-day library methods have, of course, provided a variety of approaches. Multiple national, regional, state, and local union catalogs and union lists have been created to locate specific titles. Special collections are being developed through such devices as the Farmington Plan and Public Law 480, for the cooperative acquisition of foreign books. Progress is being made, though we are far short of the millennium, in the application of automation and

mechanization to bibliographical problems. Several significant experiments are under way for the cooperative purchase and storage of little-used library materials.

My own activity in the study of library resources has been of a type somewhat different from any of those named, i.e., surveys of collections. Library resource studies can be, and are, of varied nature, ranging from descriptions of the holdings of single institutions to those of cities, states, regions, and countries. Also, the thoroughness, the amount of detail, the competence of surveyors, the care in advanced planning, the form and arrangement of data, and other aspects differ considerably from one study to another. Because some surveys have been cursory, incomplete, and poorly organized, doubts have been expressed about the value of resources surveys. Among the purposes they are ostensibly designed to serve are to aid the research worker in locating materials which he might otherwise overlook or find with difficulty, to give leads for inter-library loan inquiries, and to furnish a basis for cooperative agreements.

Techniques for describing and evaluating library facilities on the research level are still experimental. No generally accepted standards have been established, chiefly because research materials are highly heterogeneous. Even when dealing with a reasonably well-defined field, the problem of achieving clear descriptions is extremely difficult. There are those who maintain that only the subject specialist is qualified to evaluate a research collection, and the job should therefore not be attempted by the librarian with general training. Others suggest that the specialist's point of view is too narrow and should be combined with the librarian's broader knowledge of the library's total resources. Likewise, it may be argued that surveys ought to be restricted to relatively minute subject areas, with detailed analyses, rather than being inclusive of a library's resources as a whole. Exactly what types of data will be most helpful to the scholar and student are also matters of dispute.

An adequate period of preliminary preparation is one of the essentials of a successful survey of library resources. One should know precisely what details are wanted and what to look for in each collection. For example, one ought to learn the background and objectives of the library being studied and examine all available sources of information about it: annual reports, college catalogs, library handbooks, published and unpublished bibliographies, and descriptive publications. If surveying a specialized subject, it is well to familiar-

ize oneself with the literature of the field through handbooks, textbooks, and histories, to learn the terminology, to find out who are chief authorities, to look into the research trends, and to identify the learned societies and other organizations responsible for the most authoritative publishing in the field.

Another way to become acquainted with a special field is to analyze the Library of Congress classification and the latest edition of the Dewey Decimal Classification. Each classification provides for certain topical divisions and types of publications. Orientation is aided further by checking guides to reference books, subject bibliographies, classified directories of periodicals, indexing and abstracting services.

In comparing library collections, the most frequently used single criterion is the number of volumes. Unfortunately, there is little uniformity at present in the methods used for measuring library holdings. The matter of standardizing practices has received, and is receiving, the attention of various organizations. Three possible approaches have been proposed as offering the best solution to the problem: first, the traditional one of counting the number of volumes; second, recording the number of titles; and third, measuring the number of linear feet occupied. Each scheme is supported by some rather persuasive arguments, but the statistics-of-volume method is unlikely to be superseded by any other plan now in sight. The chief desideratum at present is to obtain greater uniformity in the actual application of the volume count.

Another aspect of volume statistics is the need for breakdowns by subject fields. There is no logic, for example, in comparing the number of volumes in an engineering library with those in a fine arts library, though that is exactly what we have been doing in publishing total figures for all libraries, without regard to the nature of each individual library. Analyses of holdings by broad subject fields would be more significant than over-all figures, even if categories could not be very closely defined.

There is still another phase of the problem of measuring library collections. Some of the most important materials in research libraries cannot or should not be counted as volumes. Of this nature are archives, manuscripts, speech recordings, music records, radio transcriptions, music scores, slides, maps, motion picture films, microfilms, microcards and microprints, posters, programs, photographs, prints, photostats, broadsides, etc.

To get back to further consideration of surveys of library resources,

the most important rule to be kept in mind by the surveyor is to avoid generalities and to stick to concrete facts. To illustrate, the surveyor ought specifically, wherever pertinent, to record the number of volumes or items in a collection, the period covered, the up-to-dateness of the material, what subdivisions of the subject have been stressed in the collection's development, and the presence or lack of essential reference works, periodical files, collections of primary sources, bibliographies, and rare books. Significant comparisons may be made also between a given collection and those in the same general field to be found in other institutions.

The richness and variety of American library resources are unsurpassed, and probably unequaled, by those of any other nation. Institutions of higher education in the United States contain in excess of 200,000,000 volumes, and are growing at the rate of 10,000,000 volumes per year. The book resources of the 823 largest public libraries total 130,000,000 volumes, and their growth rate is also approximately 10,000,000 volumes annually. Add to these impressive figures the holdings of great reference libraries and hundreds of special libraries, and we can rightly claim to have provided our scholarly clientele with riches beyond compare. There is no reason to anticipate, however, that library users will be satisfied. They will constantly demand more and more—and rightly so.

References

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